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31
MAY DIGITAL EDITION

SPAWN



McFARLANE
MARIE

image COMICS PRESENTS:

"THE HOMECOMING"



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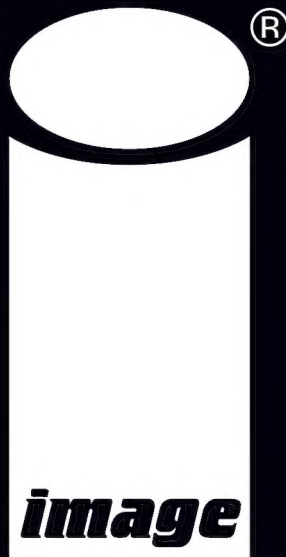
Dedicated to:
Tom Palmer

FOR IMAGE COMICS

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image

KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK

HE SITS ALONE.
SWALLOWED
WHOLE BY THE
DARKNESS.

HIS ALLOTTED
SPACE FAR
EXCEEDS THAT
OF THE OTHER,
NAMELESS,
OCCUPANTS.

TO THE
MONOTONOUS
RHYTHM OF
WHEELS GLIDING
OVER STEEL
TRACKS,
HE THINKS.

PLAYING THE SAME
THOUGHT OVER.

AND OVER.



HER FEAR AND
REJECTION, LIKE
THE FLASHES
OF LIGHT THAT
SNEAK BETWEEN
THE CRACKS,
STAB AT HIM.

HE THINKS
ABOUT IT
AGAIN.

ANOTHER
STAB.



HE SHOULDN'T
HAVE BEEN SO
QUICK TO ACT, HE
TELLS HIMSELF.

KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK-KLAK

BUT HE WAS
MAD. EVERY-
THING AROUND
HAD BECOME
A CHALLENGE.

HE KNOWS
THAT ANSWER
NOW:
FEAR AND
REJECTION.

SO HE BLINKS--A
CUE TO CHANGE THE
CHANNEL. THINK
ABOUT SOMETHING
ELSE.

THE COSTUME--
ACTUALLY A
SYMBIONT **LIFE-
FORM**-- HAS BEEN
WITH HIM THROUGH
A LOT. IT'S
RARELY WRONG.

HOME.

IT MUST BE NEAR.
THE **COSTUME**
TELLS HIM SO.



WHAT HARM
IN FACING
ANOTHER?



THE MECHANICAL HEARTBEAT
BEGINS TO SLOW AS THE STEEL
BEAST CREEPS INTO THE STATION.

HIS COSTUME
GOES LIMP.

THIS IS SPAWN'S STOP.

THE TIME FOR BANDING
TOGETHER NOW ENDED,
EACH BEGINS WHAT HE
HOPES WILL BE A
NEW LIFE.


A NEW PATH.

ONE OCCUPANT
CHOOSSES A
PATH NO OTHER
CAN FOLLOW.

EVEN BEFORE IT'S
STOPPED, SEA F
HOMELESS HUMANITY
SPEWS QUICKLY
FROM THE BOX CAR.
THEIR JOURNEY IS
ALMOST OVER. THE
PROMISED LAND IS
BUT A FEW MILES
AWAY.

THIS
FEELS
GOOD.

A CITY ONCE
HATED HAS NOW
BECOME HIS HAVEN.



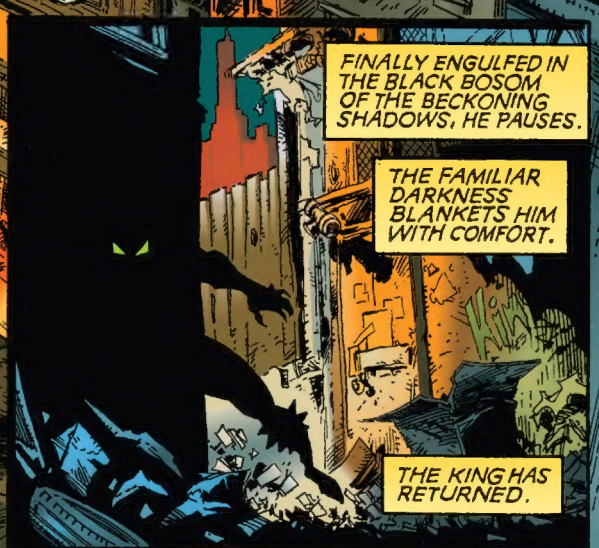
FILLED WITH AN ANXIETY HE DIDN'T EXPECT, SPAWN BREAKS INTO A SPRINT.

ADRENALIN PUMPS HARDER.

HE NEEDS HIS ALLEYS.



MORESO, HE WANTS THEM.



FINALLY ENGULFED IN THE BLACK BOSOM OF THE BECKONING SHADOWS, HE PAUSES.

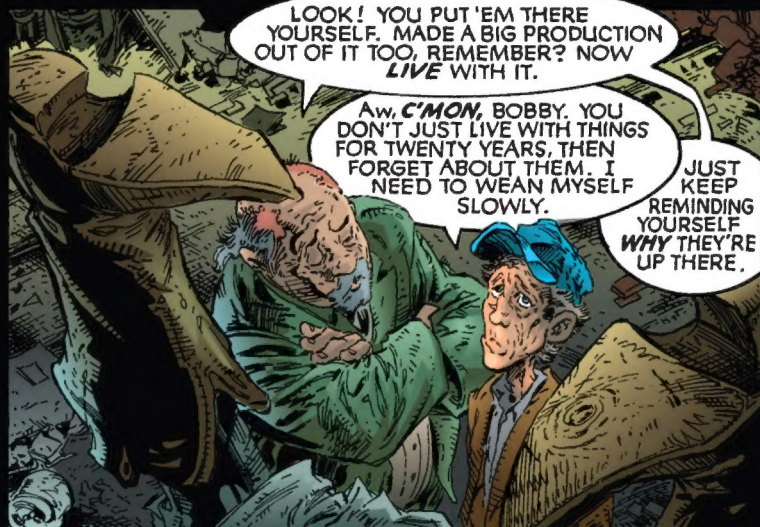
THE FAMILIAR DARKNESS BLANKETS HIM WITH COMFORT.

THE KING HAS RETURNED.



C'MON, BOOTSY, GET A GRIP. FOR THE LAST THREE WEEKS YOU'VE DRAGGED ME HERE TO LOOK AT YOUR FRIGGIN' FOOTWEAR.

BUT I MISS THEM.



LOOK! YOU PUT 'EM THERE YOURSELF. MADE A BIG PRODUCTION OUT OF IT TOO, REMEMBER? NOW **LIVE** WITH IT.

Aw, **C'MON**, BOBBY, YOU DON'T JUST LIVE WITH THINGS FOR TWENTY YEARS, THEN FORGET ABOUT THEM. I NEED TO WEAN MYSELF SLOWLY.

JUST KEEP REMINDING YOURSELF **WHY** THEY'RE UP THERE.



YEAH, I KNOW. HE DID MORE FOR US THAN I COULD EVER HOPE TO REPAY.



I MISS AL, TOO.

BUT I AIN'T GOING TO STAND AROUND ALL NIGHT BABY-SITTING. SO WAKE ME WHEN YOU COME TO YOUR SENSES.



Boo!

AWHG!

Holy...!

AL! WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU **BEEN?**! WE THOUGHT YOU WERE... YOU KNOW... GONE.

NOT A CHANCE. I'D MISS YOU GUYS TOO MUCH.

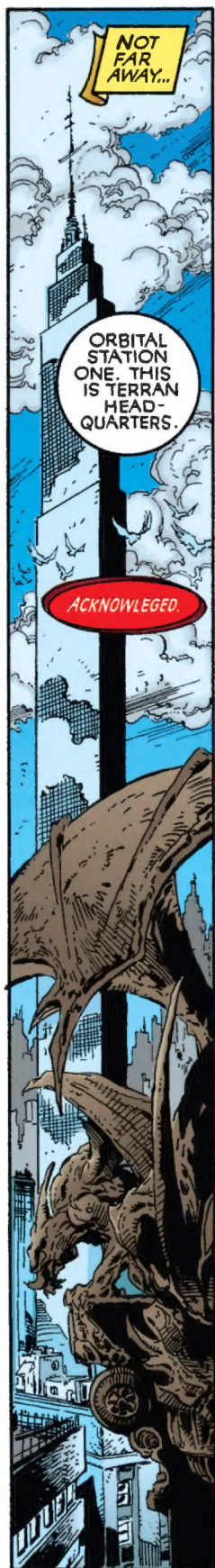
MAN, I THOUGHT FOR SURE SOMEONE HAD GOTTEN TO YOU. WITH ALL THE CRAZIES THAT'VE COME THROUGH HERE, WELL, AFTER TEN DAYS WE DIDN'T HOLD MUCH HOPE.

EVEN HAD A MEMORIAL AND STUFF.

I'M GLAD WE WERE WRONG.

THOUGH NOW THAT YOU'RE BACK, THERE'S NO POINT IN LEAVING MY BOOTS HERE.

'LEAST THEY GOT AIRED OUT.



* AS PER ANGELA #3 -- Tom.



WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT, THEN-- A **PARTIAL** DERIVATIVE? OR AN ENTIRELY NEW ENTITY?

ANALYSIS STILL INCONCLUSIVE... BUT ALL THREE READINGS OCCUR IN THE SAME FIVE-BLOCK RADIUS. THE AREA IS KNOWN LOCALLY AS "THE BOWERY," IN NEW YORK CITY.

YOU MEAN THEY'RE **ALL** IN MY BACK YARD?

IT APPEARS SO. THE TWO WEAKER SIGNALS ARE MOBILE SENTIENT BEINGS, INCIDENTALLY.

THIS IS **UNHEARD OF!** IT'S BEEN SPECULATED THAT A POWER TRANSFERENCE **MAY** BE POSSIBLE, BUT WE'VE **KNOWN** THE CHARACTER OF EACH SPAWN. **NONE** HAS EVER WILLINGLY RELEASED POWER TO ANOTHER.

THIS MAY PUT OUR PRIME TARGET IN A VULNERABLE POSITION.

HAVE YOU CHOSEN A NEW VESSEL?

AFFIRMATIVE. THIS SOLDIER WILL BE TAILORED TO OUR CURRENT DATA.

TESTS FOLLOWING OUR OTHER ATTEMPT INDICATE THAT THE ELEMENTAL FIRE CONTENT WAS ACCURATE, BUT INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE SUBJECT.

WE HAVE SINCE DECOMMISSIONED THAT FIRST SOLDIER. *

WE CONCLUDE THAT OUR NEXT SUBJECT MUST WILLINGLY EMBRACE THE VAST POWER OF THE FIRE.

Ah. A SOLDIER WITH A GOOD SOUL. PERFECT!

C'MON! NO! NOT AGAIN. THIS WON'T HELP ME FIND MY MURDER CONSPIRACY EVIDENCE.

ACCESS DENIED

HAVE TO GIVE JASON WYNN CREDIT-- HE SURE KNOWS HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF HIS INFLUENCE.

HE EITHER COMES UP SQUEAKY CLEAN OR HAS RENDERED THE INFORMATION FROZEN IN THE DATA LINK-UP. SOMEONE'S BUILT A *HECK* OF A FORTRESS AROUND HIM.

LET ME TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

UNBELIEVABLE.

HIS ENTIRE FILE DIRECTORY HAS BEEN RECLASSIFIED. MY SECURITY CLEARANCE ISN'T ENOUGH TO EVEN GET CLOSE TO THIS SECURED DATA. THAT'S NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.

THE BEST I CAN FIGURE, THOSE RECENT SECURITY CHANGES WERE DIRECTED BY AN OBSOLETE SECTOR. THEY WERE SHUT DOWN MONTHS AGO.

OLD JASON IS HIDING SOMETHING. I DOUBT EVEN THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE COULD GET TO THOSE FILES.

MAYBE IF I REROUTE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL SECTOR F, CATEGORY 12...?

HE'S GOT THE WHOLE SYSTEM WORLDWIDE LOCKED UP!

ACCESS DENIED

ACCESS DENIED

GOD!

ONLY ONE OPTION LEFT-- UPGRADE MY STATUS... WHICH MEANS A TRANSFER INTO WYNN'S DEPARTMENT.



LIKE I SAID, BEEN REAL QUIET 'ROUND HERE OF LATE. KIND OF BORING AFTER ALL THE EXCITEMENT YOU CREATED. CAN'T SAY I DON'T *MIND* THE QUIET SOMETIMES, BUT IT GIVES PEOPLE A LOT OF EMPTY TIME TO THINK ABOUT THINGS...

GOOD AND BAD.

WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?

WELL, A LOT OF THE GUYS, THEY'VE BEEN TALKING. JUST STUPID STUFF. YOU KNOW-- DUMB RUMORS. EVEN A LITTLE PARANOIA, IF YOU ASK *ME*. BUT THE TALK HASN'T QUIETED DOWN, AL, NOW YOU'RE BACK. IT'LL GET CRAZY.

I HEARD THE OTHER DAY THAT A BUNCH OF GUYS WANT TO DRIVE YOU *OUTTA* HERE. THINK YOU'RE *NO GOOD*. THEY THINK YOU'VE JUST SUCKED THE *LIFE* OUT OF THEIR TERRITORY.

DON'T HAVE A CHOICE.

BOOTSY AND I, *WE* WANT YOU HERE. YOU GAVE ME MY *LIFE* BACK. * I'LL NEVER *FORGET* THAT-- NEVER *DESERT* YOU. THAT'S WHY IT WAS SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND HOW *YOU* COULD JUST SPLIT AND NOT SAY *ANYTHING*.

BUNCH OF ANGELS DRAGGED ME TO HEAVEN, THEN DUMPED ME IN THE *DEEP SOUTH*. BEING A SPAWN MAKES ME A PRIME ITEM ON THEIR AGENDA. IT JUST TOOK ME THIS LONG TO GET BACK WITHOUT USING THE LIMITED ENERGY THAT *DEVIL* GAVE ME.

BEING AWAY WAS A CHANCE TO SEE THAT MY EXISTENCE ISN'T THE ONLY ONE THAT'S OUT OF CONTROL.

"NO ONE SEEMS SAFE FROM CONFLICT. NOT ANGELS.

"NOT CHILDREN.

"AND SOME GO TO DRAMATIC LENGTHS TO CREATE THE VIOLENCE."



SO LET WHOEVER YOU RUN INTO KNOW THAT I'M BACK. TELL 'EM TO DEAL WITH THAT FACT.

ANYWAY, WHERE IS MY GOOD BUDDY, THE CURSE? GOT TIRED OF HANGING AROUND?*

WHAT A MESS, uh?

*FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE -- TOM.

DUNNO. NO ONE DOES. BUT HE'S BEEN MISSING FOR A WHILE. MUST'VE BEEN IN A HELLUVA HURRY, THOUGH. DIDN'T EVEN TAKE PART OF HIS ARM WITH HIM.

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

...WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH YOUR CAPE? IT DOESN'T SEEM VERY IMPRESSIVE ANYMORE. I THOUGHT IT PROTECTED YOU OR SOMETHING.

YOU GOT ME, BOOTSY. IT JUST KIND OF FREAKED OUT WHILE I WAS IN HEAVEN. I LOST MOST OF IT WHILE ESCAPING. IT'S STILL ACTING WEIRD NOW, WEEKS LATER. THE WHOLE COSTUME'S BEEN FAR MORE AGGRESSIVE. THE LARGE PIECES OF ITS CAPE THAT WERE TORN AWAY HAVE LEFT IT WEAK AND IN SHOCK.

I'M HOPING IT DOESN'T GET TOO BIZARRE.



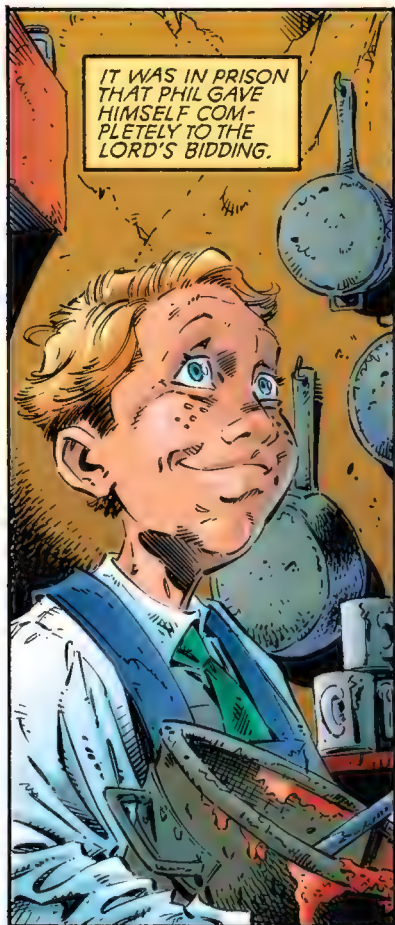


"IT HAD BEEN A MIRACLE," HIS MOTHER KEPT TELLING EVERYONE.

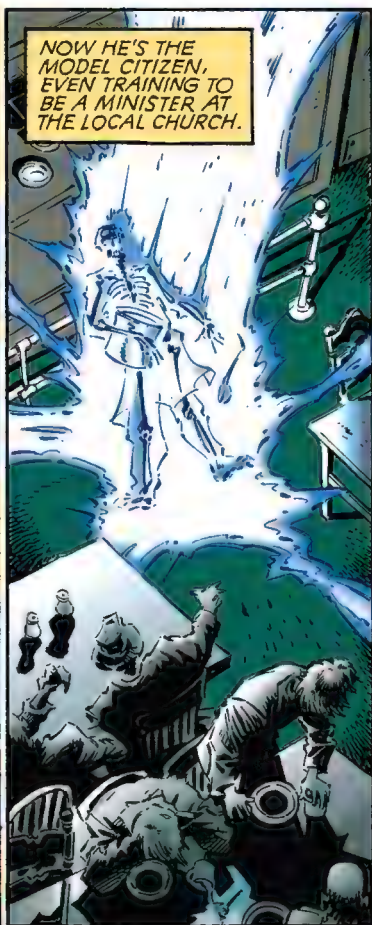


NO ONE, NOT EVEN HIS PARENTS, EXPECTED SUCH A LIFE CHANGE FROM PHIL TIMPER.

CONSTANTLY IN AND OUT OF JUVENILE DETENTION FROM EARLY ON. FINALLY CONVICTED AND INCARCERATED: TWO YEARS FOR FELONY GRAND THEFT.



IT WAS IN PRISON THAT PHIL GAVE HIMSELF COMPLETELY TO THE LORD'S BIDDING.



NOW HE'S THE MODEL CITIZEN, EVEN TRAINING TO BE A MINISTER AT THE LOCAL CHURCH.



AFTER ELEVEN SOLID YEARS SERVING THE LORD, HE STILL PRAYS EVERY NIGHT THAT HE WILL BE WORTHY OF GOD'S KINGDOM WHEN THE TIME COMES.

ORBITAL
STATION
ONE.

BI-LEVEL
SENSORS
INDICATE AN
EVEN GREATER
TOLERANCE FOR
PAIN THAN
ORIGINALLY
PROJECTED.

OUR
SOLDIER
SHALL
BE NEAR
PERFECT.

THE COMBINED
EMOTIONAL AND
PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES
MAKE HIM INDEED A
SUPERIOR VESSEL. IN
A FEW MINUTES THE
SUBJECT'S BODY
COMPOSITION WILL
COMPLETE THE
INTERNAL TRANS-
MUTATION.

ALL THAT
OUR REDEEMER
YET REQUIRES
IS THE FINAL
STEP.

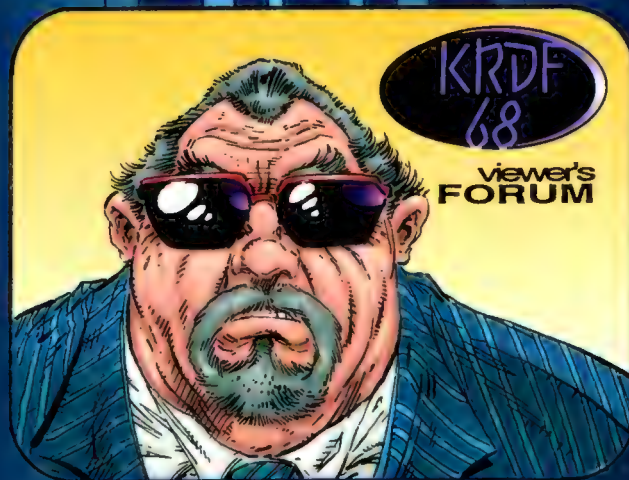
NUCLEAR
FIRE
DIFFUSION.



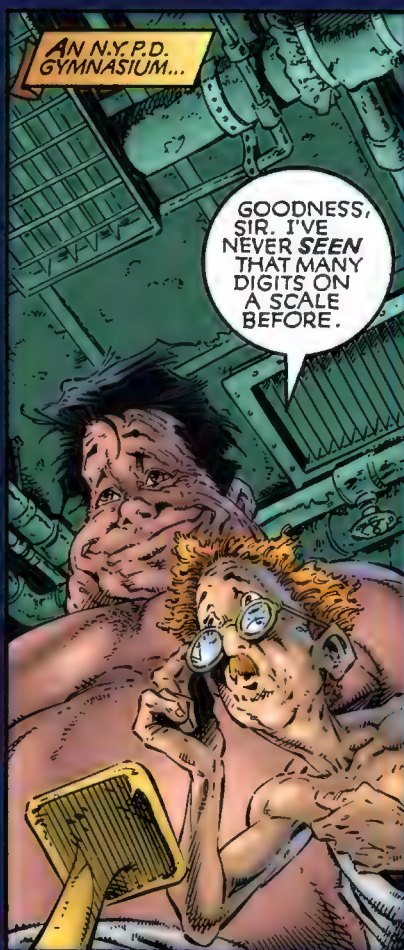
EARLIER TODAY IN NEW YORK CITY'S BOWERY, A "MYSTERIOUS LIGHT" WAS AT THE CENTER OF THE UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCE OF ONE OF THE AREA'S LEADING CITIZENS. PHIL TIMPER HAD WORKED WITH THE HOMELESS THROUGH VARIOUS CHARITIES AND SHELTERS FOR ELEVEN YEARS, AND WAS HONORED LAST YEAR AS "VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR" BY THE CITY'S MAYOR. NUMEROUS EYEWITNESSES TELL ESSENTIALLY THE SAME STORY: CNN HAS LEARNED. THEY CLAIM TIMPER WAS STRUCK BY WHAT APPEARED TO BE LIGHTNING, AND VANISHED. HIS GRATEFUL CLIENTS SCoured THE AREA IN VAIN. TIMPER IS OFFICIALLY LISTED AS MISSING, BUT SOME HAVE EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT HE COULD HAVE SURVIVED THE EXPERIENCE.



NEW YORK'S FINEST ARE STILL AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A PROMINENT GOOD SAMARITAN AT THAT BOWERY CHARITY MISSION EARLIER TODAY. A SOURCE AT THE POLICE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE REVEALED THAT THE INVESTIGATION MAY INCLUDE THE CAPED VIGILANTE KNOWN AS SPAWN. THIS ELUSIVE MASKED FIGURE HAS BEEN A FIXTURE IN THE BOWERY SINCE HIS ARRIVAL SOME MONTHS AGO, AND HAS CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN HIS SHARE OF FUSS AND COMMOTION TO THE SCENE. OUR CRIMSON AVENGER'S RECENT EXTENDED, UNEXPLAINED ABSENCE HAS LEFT THE SHABBY LITTLE DISTRICT MUCH AS HE FOUND IT: DREARIER AND QUIETER THAN ANY RIGHT-THINKING PART OF MANHATTAN SHOULD EVER BE.



NOW, **BAM!** OUT OF LEFT FIELD COMES ANOTHER NEW YORK MOMENT AS A MODEL CITIZEN **VANISHES** FROM THE MIDDLE OF A SOUP KITCHEN. THIS IS THE SAME WELL-SCRUBBED CITIZEN WHO WAS SHOWERED WITH GOLDEN HYPE DURING OUR PREVIOUS MAYOR'S FAILED REELECTION BID. COULD THE SORE LOSER HAVE CALLED IN ONE LAST FAVOR FROM ON HIGH AND HAD THE POOR LAD **SACRIFICED** ON THE ALTAR OF **UNWEL-COME AMBITION?** THE BOYS IN BLUE, MEANWHILE, HAVE GIVEN THIS CASE THE SAME CARE AND ATTENTION THEY WOULD A STOLEN CAR RADIO IN TIMES SQUARE. JUST GOES TO SHOW HOW SINCERE OUR POLITICIANS ARE ABOUT THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE LITTLE GUY. PICK OUT AN "AW-SHUCKS" SOCIAL WORKER, GIVE 'IM A TROPHY AT A PRESS CONFERENCE, THEN LET HIM GO ROT. GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE!



"AND I DON'T THINK IT'S GOING TO BRIGHTEN UP HIS DAY."



AT 4:00 a.m., THE BOWERY'S BACKSTREETS FINALLY DRAG TO A HALT. EACH OF THE ALLEY'S OCCUPANTS HAS SOUGHT OUT HIS PLACE OF REST. A CAREFUL PECKING ORDER UNDERLIES THE COZY JUMBLE.

IT IS ONE OF THE SHORT PERIODS WHEN IT'S SAFE TO REST.

ESPECIALLY TONIGHT. WORD SPREAD QUICKLY OF THEIR KING'S RETURN. NOW THEY CAN SLEEP LIKE BABIES. AND LIKE A PROUD FATHER HE STANDS IN THE SHADOWS AND LOOKS DOWN ON THEM, HIS CHILDREN.

"THE MOMENT FEELS SO NATURAL," THE CREATURE CALLED SPAWN THINKS.

AS HE LISTENS TO THEIR MUFFLED BREATHING, A SUDDEN SENSATION GRIPS HIM.


HIS CHAINS PULL TOWARD SOME UNKNOWN DESTINATION.

"Danger," THE COSTUME IS TELLING ITS HOST.

HE SPRINTS THREE CITY BLOCKS BEFORE ROUNDING THE LAST CORNER-- THEN STOPS DEAD IN HIS TRACKS.

HE CURSES THE TWISTED EXISTENCE THAT'S NOW HIS...

... AND CURSES THE FAMILIAR FIGURE BEFORE HIM.



...THEREFORE
YOUR SIGNAL RADIATES
THE MOST WEAKLY OF
THE THREE. A NECRO-
PLASM TRANSFERRAL
FROM A HELLSPAWN
IS THE PROBABLE
SOURCE.

TRUE.

BUT YOUR
NEWFOUND
LIFE HAS
MADE YOU A
RECEPTACLE
FOR A
RESIDUAL AURA
YOU'D HAVE
NO WAY OF
PERCEIVING.

YOU POSE
NO THREAT.
YOU ARE, HOW-
EVER, THE FIRST
SUCH CASE
TO BE DOCU-
MENTED.

ORBITAL
STATION ONE,
SENTIENT BEING
LOCATED.
PERMISSION
TO RETURN
TO BASE.

WHAT'RE
YOU
TALKING
ABOUT?!!
YOU CRAZY
PUNK!

I'M
NOT SPAWN!

AFFIRMATIVE,
REDEEMER.
LOCATOR
READINGS
CONFIRM
ANALYSIS OF
SOURCE.

THE SCENE
IS BEGINNING
TO PLAY LIKE
A BAD SCI-FI
MOVIE.



I'M GOING
TO ASK JUST
ONCE. BACK AWAY
FROM HIM. NICE
AND SLOW
LIKE.

THIS IS
BETWEEN
YOU AND ME,
ANTI-
SPAWN.

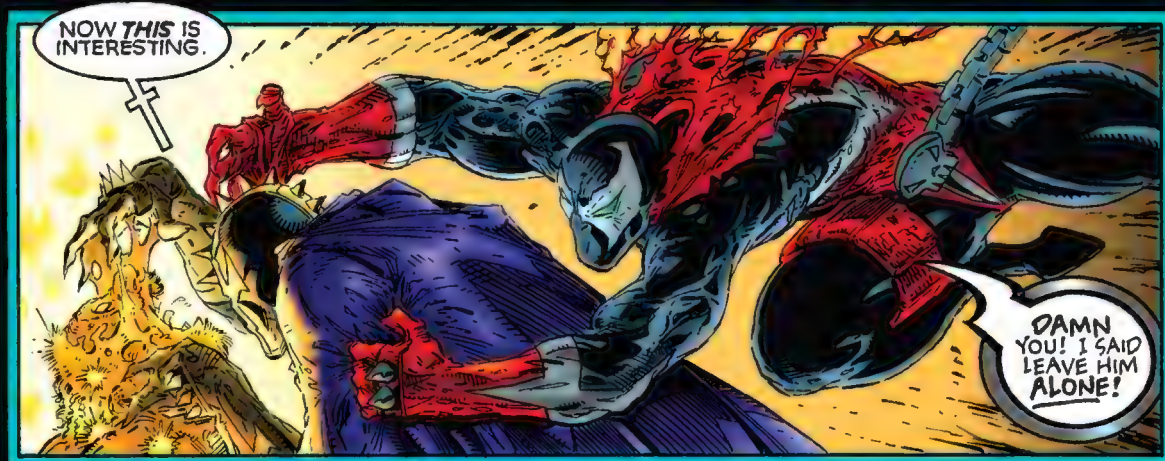


THE NAME IS
REDEEMER.

MY
MISSION IS
WITH **THIS**
SUBJECT. NOT
YOU. SO
LEAVE.

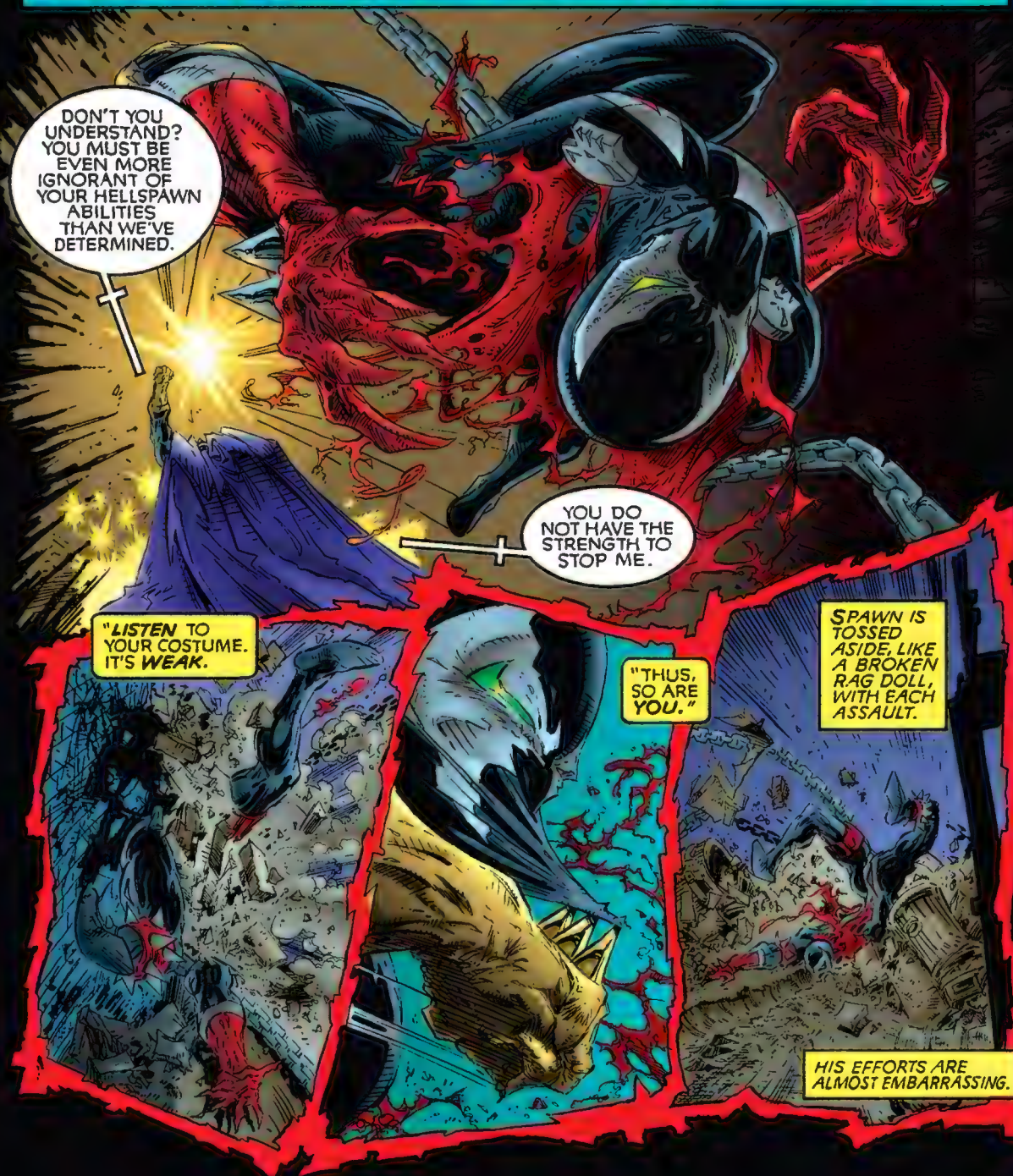


YOUR
TIME
WILL COME
LATER.



NOW *THIS* IS INTERESTING.

DAMN YOU! I SAID LEAVE HIM ALONE!



DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU MUST BE EVEN MORE IGNORANT OF YOUR HELLSPAWN ABILITIES THAN WE'VE DETERMINED.

YOU DO NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH TO STOP ME.

"LISTEN TO YOUR COSTUME. IT'S WEAK."

"THUS, SO ARE YOU."

SPAWN IS TOSSED ASIDE, LIKE A BROKEN RAG DOLL, WITH EACH ASSAULT.

HIS EFFORTS ARE ALMOST EMBARRASSING.



DIRECT ATTACK IS FUTILE.
TRICKERY NOW SEEMS TO
BE HIS ONLY OPTION.

SPAWN POSITIONS HIM-
SELF DIRECTLY IN
REDEEMER'S LINE OF FIRE,
KNOWING THE DAMAGE
WILL BE SEVERE, BUT LESS
CRIPPLING THAN IT
APPEARS.

I SAID,
RELEASE
HIM!!

UNFORTUNATELY, HIS
STRATEGY HAS FAILED. HE
NEVER CONSIDERED THAT
REDEEMER WOULD TELE-
PORT, HIS VICTIM IN TOW.

LYING IN A CRUMPLED,
EXHAUSTED HEAP, SPAWN AND
HIS COSTUME ARE UNABLE TO
RECOVER IN TIME TO HELP
HIS FRIEND.

MAN,
LOOKIT THE
SIZE OF THAT
HOLE!

THE CURSE GAVE
IT TO ME A WHILE BACK.*
DIDN'T WANT TO WASTE
POWER FIXING IT. THE
COSTUME MENDED IT-
SELF OVER IT.

I WAS
HOPING THE
REDEEMER WOULD
THINK HE'D DONE ME
SOME SERIOUS
DAMAGE, AND GIVE
ME AN OPENING
TO AMBUSH
HIM.

DOES
IT
HURRK!

HORROR EN-
GULFS SPAWN
AS HIS COS-
TUME ACTS
ON ITS OWN,
FLAILING AND
SNAPPING
UNCONTROL-
LABLY.

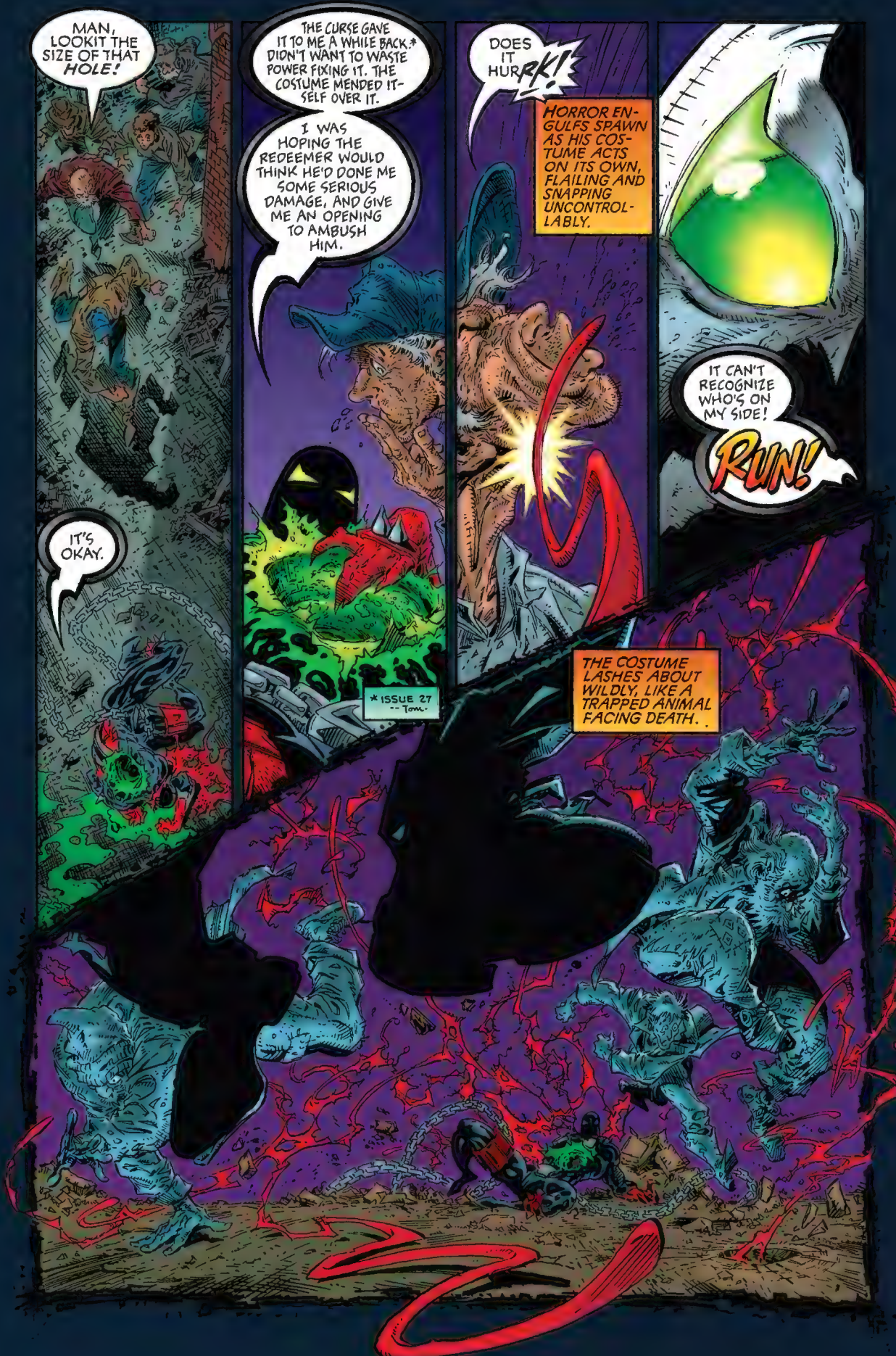
IT CAN'T
RECOGNIZE
WHO'S ON
MY SIDE!

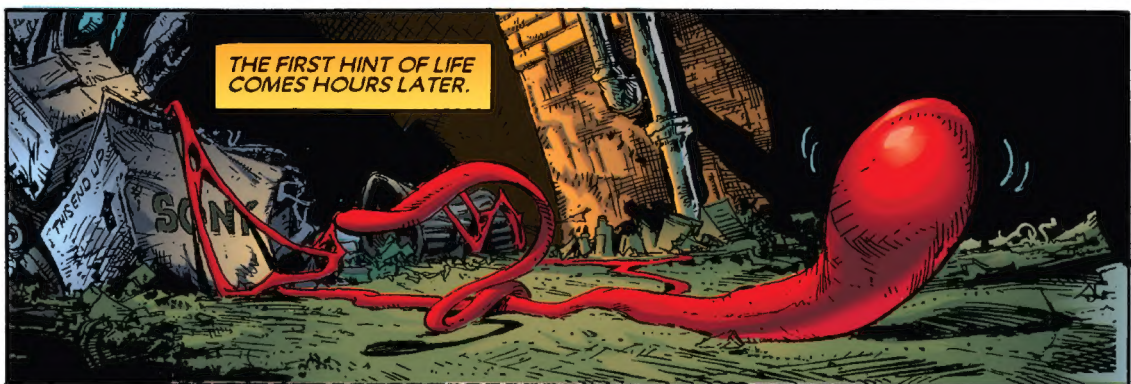
RUN!

IT'S
OKAY.

*ISSUE 27
--Tom--

THE COSTUME
LASHES ABOUT
WILDLY, LIKE A
TRAPPED ANIMAL
FACING DEATH.





TO
GROW.

IT
BEGINS
TO
MOVE.

TO
BREATHE.



THE COSTUME
LIVES.

AGAIN.

NEXT
ISSUE: *A NEW LOOK*





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE